

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY MADRID
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3188
INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY DAKAR
AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE
AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
AMEMBASSY RABAT

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 00752

E.O.11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PEPR, SP, SS
SUBJECT: SPAIN AND THE SAHARA

1. SUMMARY: SPAIN'S WITHDRAWAL FROM ITS FORMER SAHARA TERRITORY WAS UNCOMFORTABLE AT THE TIME AND HAS BECOME CONTROVERSIAL AT HOME, BUT THE BASIC POLICY STANCE TAKEN AT THE TIME -- APPEALING TO MOROCCO AND MAURITANIA THROUGH THE TRANSFER OF ADMINISTRATION WHILE APPEASING ALGERIA WITH THE POSITION THAT EFFECTIVE SELF-DETERMINATION HAD NOT YET TAKEN PLACE -- REMAINS IN EFFECT. SOME NUANCES HAVE BEEN INTRODUCED, NOTABLY ADDED EMPHASIS ON SELF-DETERMINATION AND AN ARMS EMBARGO FOR THE COUNTRIES INVOLVED, AND FURTHER FINE TUNING IS ALWAYS POSSIBLE. THE GOS WOULD SEEM TO HAVE LITTLE ROOM FOR MANEUVER ON THE ISSUE, HOWEVER, AND WE EXPECT THE BASIC SPANISH POSITION TO REMAIN INTACT AS LONG AS THE STALEMATE IN THE SAHARA DOES. END SUMMARY.

2. SPAIN'S WITHDRAWAL FROM ITS WESTERN SAHARA
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TERRITORY IN FEBRUARY 1976 WAS A DIFFICULT AND UNHAPPY EXPERIENCE FOR THE COUNTRY: MINDFUL OF DECOLONIZATION PRESSURES FROM WITHIN THE UN, AND FACING THE DEATH OF FRANCO (HE WAS ALREADY ILL, AND DIED ONLY SIX DAYS AFTER THE MADRID AGREEMENTS), SPAIN SAW ITSELF THREATENED WITH A COLONIAL WAR WHICH, PARTICULARLY IN VIEW OF THE PORTUGUESE EXPERIENCE AND THE FACT

THAT IT WOULD BE CONCURRENT WITH THE POST-FRANCO PERIOD, IT WAS SIMPLY UNWILLING TO FIGHT. IT ALSO HAD TO CONSIDER ITS RELATIONSHIPS WITH, AND THE BALANCE AMONG, THE COUNTRIES OF THE REGION. IN A DECISION WHICH WAS PRAISED AS ADEPT BY FOREIGN OBSERVERS, PRODUCED A CONSIDERABLE SENSE OF RELIEF AT HOME, AND REMAINS THE BASIS OF THE GOS POLICY POSITION, THE GOS OPTED (THROUGH THE NOVEMBER 1975 MADRID AGREEMENTS AND THE FEBRUARY 1976 COMMUNICATION TO UNSYG WALDHEIM) TO

-- RELINQUISH ITS COLONIAL RESPONSIBILITIES TO A "TEMPORARY" MOROCCAN-MAURITANIAN ADMINISTRATION;

-- REMOVE ITS OFFICIAL PRESENCE;

-- LEAVE UNTREATED THE QUESTION OF SOVEREIGNTY; AND
-- DECLARE ITS SUPPORT FOR SELF-DETERMINATION.

BEYOND GETTING THE DECOLONIZATION HAWKS OFF ITS BACK, THE GOS SOUGHT THEREBY TO TAKE A BALANCED STANCE, APPEALING TO MOROCCO/MAURITANIA THROUGH THE TRANSFER OF ADMINISTRATION WHILE APPEASING ALGERIA WITH THE POSITION THAT EFFECTIVE SELF-DETERMINATION HAD NOT YET TAKEN PLACE. FORMALLY, THE SPANISH POSITION IS ONE OF NEUTRALITY. AS FOREIGN MINISTER OREJA RECENTLY CONFIDENTIAL

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DECLARED, "SPAIN IS NOT ALIGNED WITH ANY OF THE PARTIES INVOLVED IN THE SAHARA CONFLICT... THE GOS WANTS CORDIAL AND NORMAL RELATIONS WITH MOROCCO AND ALGERIA... OUR COUNTRY DOES NOT ACT AGAINST ANYBODY..."

3. INEVITABLY, NEITHER ALGERIA NOR MOROCCO (MAURITANIA EMERGES A DISTANT THIRD IN SPANISH CONSIDERATION OF THE NATIONS INVOLVED) HAS BEEN SATISFIED WITH THE GOS STANCE, AND UNFORTUNATELY FOR SPAIN, BOTH HAVE CARDS TO PLAY AGAINST IT. FOR ITS PART, MOROCCO KNOWS THAT FISHING IN ITS WATERS IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT FOR SPAIN. MORE IMPORTANTLY, THE VULNERABILITY OF THE SPANISH ENCLAVES OF CEUTA AND MELILLA IS A SOURCE OF ABIDING CONCERN FOR SPAIN. ALGERIA PLAYS NOT ONLY THE POLISARIO CARD, BUT ALSO SUPPORTS CANARIES INDEPENDENTIST ANTONIO CUBILLO, WHICH SEVERELY ANGERS THE GOS (77 MADRID 10446). THE SPANISH ARE UNDERSTANDABLY SENSITIVE OVER PERSISTENT EFFORTS WITHIN THE OAU TO LABEL THE CANARIES A CASE OF AFRICAN COLONIZATION: THE GOS FINDS THESE EFFORTS AS GALLING AS THEY ARE UNFOUNDED, BUT IT IS MINDFUL OF AFRICAN SENSITIVITIES, NOT LEAST BECAUSE OF THE FORMAL OAU RESPONSIBILITY FOR SEEKING A SAHARA SOLUTION.

(TRADE WITH NEITHER OF THE TWO COUNTRIES LOOMS LARGE IN THE OVERALL SPANISH COMMERICAL PICTURE, AND POLITICAL FACTORS APPEARS TO DOMINATE SPANISH POLICY DECISIONS IN THIS AREA.)

4. AIDING THE ALGERIAN/POLISARIO SIDE IS THE FRANKLY PRO-POLISARIO STANCE OF THE PSOE (SPANISH WORKERS' SOCIALIST PARTY), THE MAJOR OPPOSITION PARTY AND THE ONLY CURRENT ALTERNATIVE TO POWER. THE PSOE'S LONG-STANDING SUPPORT FOR THE POLISARIO STEMS AT LEAST PARTLY FROM ITS INEXPERIENCE, WHICH ON SOME

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ISSUES LEADS IT TO ADOPT THIRD-WORLD STANCES UNMITIGATED BY SOPHISTICATED CONSIDERATION OF THE SPANISH NATIONAL INTEREST, AND WHICH TIME AND PROXIMITY TO POWER MAY ALTER. (THERE ARE ALSO UNCONFIRMED REPORTS THAT ALGERIA HAS PROVIDED SOME FUNDING TO THE PSOE BUT, EVEN IF THERE IS SOME BASIS TO SUCH REPORTS, WE WOULD DOUBT THAT THIS WOULD BE AN OVER-RIDING DETERMINATOR FOR THE PSOE.)

5. IN ANY EVENT, WITHIN MONTHS OF SPAIN'S APPARENTLY SUCCESSFUL ESCAPE FROM THE SAHARA AND ITS PROBLEMS, CRITICISMS BEGAN TO ARISE, FOCUSING ON THE THEME THAT THE COUNTRY HAD KNUCKLED UNDER TO MOROCCAN PRESSURE (THE GREEN MARCH) AND ABANDONED ITS RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE SAHRAWI PEOPLE. THESE THEMES, PLUS OCCASIONAL, SUBDUED CHARGES FROM THE LEFT THAT SPANISH

OFFICIALS RECEIVED PAYOFFS FROM MOROCCO AS PART OF
THE ARRANGEMENT, RECUR IN ONGOING DOMESTIC TREATMENT
OF THE TOPIC AND ACCOUNT IN PART FOR THE FACT THAT
THE SAHARA CONTINUES TO BE A MAJOR FOREIGN-AFFAIRS
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ISSUE ON THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL SCENE. OTHER ELEMENTS
EXPLAINING THE STILL-GREAT SPANISH INTEREST IN THE
PROBLEM:

-- THE TRADITIONAL (AND CONTINUING) SOUTHERN FOCUS
OF SPAIN'S DEFENSE POSTURE;

-- THE NEED TO MAINTAIN REASONABLE RELATIONS WITH
BOTH ALGERIA AND MOROCCO; AND

-- THE VULNERABLE POSITION IN WHICH THE WITHDRAWAL
FROM THE SAHARA LEFT THE NEARBY CANARY ISLANDS.

6. THE PSOE PRO-POLISARIO EFFORT HAS BEEN A
MAJOR FACTOR IN BRINGING THE GOS TO MAKE SOME
ADJUSTMENTS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF ITS BASIC SAHARA
POLICY. THESE ADJUSTMENTS -- A PROHIBITION ON NEW
ARMS-SHIPMENTS CONTRACTS TO THE COUNTRIES INVOLVED
(WHICH LEFT ALGERIA UNAFFECTED) AND A CONSCIOUS
DECISION TO LEAN SOMEWHAT MORE HEAVILY RECENTLY ON
THE SELF-DETERMINATION FOOT -- HAVE DOUBTLESS BEEN
AIMED ALSO AT IMPROVING THE SPANISH POSITION IN
INTERNATIONAL EYES, AS HAVE FOREIGN MINISTER OREJA'S
CALLS FOR PEACE AMONG THE PARTIES AND HIS DECLARATIONS
OF THE SPANISH WILLINGNESS TO HELP IN ANY WAY
POSSIBLE.

7. THE GOS OBVIOUSLY HAS NO DESIRE TO REASSUME THE
BURDENS OF EMPIRE, AND ANY DENUNCIATION OF THE MADRID
AGREEMENTS WOULD APPEAR, JURIDICALLY AT LEAST, TO HAVE
THE EFFECT OF SADDLING SPAIN ONCE AGAIN WITH ITS
OLD RESPONSIBILITIES (AND LIABILITIES) AS THE ADMINISTER-
ING POWER. ON THE OTHER HAND, AT THIS STAGE IT CAN
HARDLY ABANDON THE PRINCIPLE OF SELF-DETERMINATION
FOR THE SAHRAWI PEOPLE. THUS, DESPITE THE CONTINUING
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POLEMIC AT HOME OVER THE SAHARA PROBLEM, THE GOS
WOULD SEEM TO HAVE LITTLE ROOM FOR MANEUVER ON
THIS ISSUE. NUANCES IN ONE DIRECTION OR THE OTHER
ARE ALWAYS POSSIBLE, BUT WE EXPECT THE BASIC SPANISH
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IN THE SAHARA DOES, STABLER

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